



College partnerships build students' financial knowledge

Situation

Student loan debt exceeds credit card and auto loan debt in the U.S. according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2015). Seventy-four percent of students attending Wisconsin public universities now take out loans to help pay for college, with the average indebtedness of 2014-15 graduates earning a bachelor's degree from the UW System reported at \$30,650.

Building and maintaining a positive credit history is vital for young people renting an apartment, purchasing a car and insurance, and even securing a job after college. Failing to manage finances successfully while starting out in life can contribute to dropping out of college, defaulting on student loans, or damaging a credit history for many years to come. After college, a poor credit record can also hinder a student's future ability to buy a home, or delay starting a family.

The majority of Americans think personal finance should be taught to all students at least as early as high school. While about half of Wisconsin high schools offer personal finance, most do not require it.

Response

Pilot project formed

In May 2012, students at the Rice Lake and New Richmond campuses of Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Barron County campus were invited to participate in an online survey on financial literacy designed by UW-Extension and conducted by UW-River Falls Survey Research Center.

Most of the 300 respondents said they were interested in educational offerings on financial topics delivered through in-person classes. One-on-one financial coaching was followed by self-directed online classes.

Additional UW-Extension focus group interviews with UW-Barron and UW-River Falls students showed that most were concerned about paying for college. Students also wanted the educational experience to be fun, interactive, and competitive.

Based on the survey results, the UW-Extension Financial Capability Supporting Success Pilot Project was designed with the goal of increasing the financial capability of college students at three 2-year campuses: UW-Barron County, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College-New Richmond and Rice Lake. The program was expanded to UW-River Falls in 2014.

“I feel so much better on beginning my own financial journey—I needed help!”

—Student participant in financial literacy class

Family Living Programs Impact Report

Educational activities were adapted to meet each school's unique student needs and included student center educational displays, interactive classes, and residence hall programs.

Statewide financial education

A 2014 survey of UW-Extension county educators showed that 17 were providing financial education on public and private 2- and 4-year college campuses throughout Wisconsin. Financial education activities included workshops, displays, guest speaking in classrooms, and use of social media. UW-Extension Portage County developed a student volunteer financial coaching program in partnership with UW-Stevens Point.

To share resources, strategies, and coordinate financial education on college campuses, the UW-Extension Family Financial Security Team developed a 'College Partnerships' workgroup in 2014.

Results

- In 2015, UW-Extension family living educators reported **reaching almost 1,000 college students throughout Wisconsin.**
- End-of-workshop surveys from 163 UW-Barron and UW-River Falls students indicated that the majority of students who did not previously engage in positive financial behaviors planned to check their credit reports, set financial goals, and establish credit.
- The Barron County UW-Extension family living educator reached more than 400 students through her **"Supporting Success"** partnership. Students increased knowledge of how values and feelings affect their spending, how to create a spending plan and financial goals, and how to obtain a free credit report—as

well as understanding the value of building good credit for the future. Students set goals such as buying a house, saving more money to study abroad, staying out of debt, and saving money for a child. UW-Barron staff also saw benefits to the campus including student access to financial education and one-on-one financial coaching. To learn more, contact **Missy Bablick, Barron County family living educator, missy.bablick@ces.uwex.edu.**

- At the UW-River Falls, the St. Croix County UW-Extension family living educator has provided financial education for more than 400 students since 2014 through the **"\$martU"** program. To look at the impact of conducting financial education, the educator distributed a \$martU piggy bank to 97 students to promote personal savings. Of the 97 students receiving a bank, 52 participated in a workshop and received weekly money saving tips, while 45 received neither a class nor tips. At the end of the semester, 22 students reported saving a total of \$2,106 over six weeks. The 14 students who received the tips and a workshop with their piggy bank saved an average of \$141 per student, while students who received just the piggy bank with no education saved an average of \$15. For more, contact **Joan Sprain, St. Croix County family living educator, joan.sprain@ces.uwex.edu.**
- The Portage County family living educator trained financial coaches at UW-Stevens Point. Evaluations indicated all students who became coaches increased both their financial knowledge and their comfort level in coaching their

peers. After participating in the coaching training, a UW-Stevens Point case manager of Student Affairs, in conjunction with UW-Extension, secured a campus location for financial wellness in the College of Professional Studies Building. Students can offer their peers financial coaching on a walk-in basis, with set hours of availability each week. In addition, a website with frequently asked questions and answers is being developed, while financial wellness trainings at dorms and the student center are held each semester. The financial coaches have become a recognized organization on campus called the Financial Literacy Association. For more, contact **Sherry Daniels, Portage County family living educator, sherry.daniels@ces.uwex.edu, 715-346-1321.**

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Lessons learned from student surveys, focus groups, and pilot efforts indicate that each college campus has unique needs. Some have more traditional student bodies with on-campus housing, while others have nontraditional or returning adult students with additional stressors from full-time jobs and families. The responsiveness and presence of UW-Extension family living educators in each county allowed customized financial education activities to best fit the needs of each campus.

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University of Wisconsin, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin counties cooperating.

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